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### ***“They can achieve their aims without native skills in the field of work or studies”: Hungarian students’ views on English as a lingua franca***

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#### **Abstract**

Despite the fact that there is a growing body of research on the characteristics and use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in Europe, there are relatively few studies aimed at investigating the ways in which language learners voice their opinions about ELF and how they see ELF impacting their own learning. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to find out what English language majors (and ELF users) think about ELF. In order to get an insiders’ perspective on the issue, 250 one-paragraph argumentative essays on the necessity of learning to speak like a native or using ELF were analyzed for their content. The main results show the investigated sample’s predictable though not unanimous preference for prestigious native varieties. More pertinent to this article is that in spite of this preference the students demonstrate a definite awareness of ELF expressed in a large number of statements acknowledging the worldwide importance of knowing English and that today English is used by far more non-native than native speakers of the language. Though not all our research participants favor the use of ELF, many of them see it as a necessity.

**Keywords:** English as a lingua franca (ELF), ELF users, native and non-native speakers, ELF awareness, native varieties

English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Baker, 2009; Canagarajah, 2007; Dewey, 2007; Jenkins, 2005b, 2006a; Seidlhofer, 2004, 2005; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006) is still a relatively new term although sister concepts such as English as a global language (Brumfit, 2002; Crystal, 1997, 2003) and English as an international language (Holliday, 2005; Jenkins, 2000; Pennycook, 1994; Seidlhofer, 2003; Widdowson, 1997) have been around for quite some time. However, after some years of parallel use of terms a large group of researchers, when writing about the use of English by non native speakers (NNSs), seem to be settling on identifying it as ELF and define it both in terms of what it is and what it is not. In the context of this paper we use the term ELF to mean “English when it is used as a contact language across linguacultures whose members are in the main so-called non-native speakers” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 161). It is frequently emphasized that ELF is not interlanguage but a variety of English in its own right, a part of World Englishes (Jenkins, 2006a, b; Seidlhofer, 2004). Although in the strict sense ELF interaction excludes native speakers (NSs), some researchers (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2005), do not preclude NS participation from ELF discourse. From a learner’s perspective one of the most important differences between ELF and English as a foreign language (EFL) is that in EFL the learners’ ultimate goal is to become native-like, while ELF users, who “can express their identities and be themselves in L2 contexts” (Mauranen, 2003, p. 517), aim at achieving “expert level” competence (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 141).

The strength of the research in this area can be felt in the large number of participants from all over the world attending international ELF conferences. In 2011, the fourth ELF conference in Hong Kong attracted hundreds of participants, and around 100 papers were read in multiple parallel sessions. The launching of a new, international journal, JELF, the Journal of English as a Lingua Franca announced by its editors Jennifer Jenkins, Barbara Seidlhofer and Anna Mauranen in Hong Kong can be taken as an indication that ELF is here to stay. Investigating the features of ELF and its use is an exciting topic for researchers but perhaps even more exciting is finding out how its users relate to this new phenomenon. This paper is going to look into the ideas of students and users – many of them also future teachers of English – whether they are aware of ELF, and if they are, whether they embrace, tolerate or abhor it.

### **Review of the Literature**

Research in the field of English as a lingua franca can be subdivided into at least two subfields. A number of researchers (e.g., Breiteneder, 2009; House, 2003; Jenkins, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen,

2007, 2010; Mauranen, 2003; Meierkord, 2000; Pitzl, Breiteneder, & Klimpfinger, 2008; Seidlhofer, 2003; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006) set out to investigate the features and use of ELF. In her groundbreaking work Jenkins (2000, 2006a, b) investigated NNS-NNS interaction in order to observe and describe its most pertinent phonological features, and to identify the items NNSs have to be able to produce in order to avoid misunderstandings in communication with each other. She compiled a list of lingua franca core features necessary for achieving mutual comprehensibility in NNS-NNS interaction and distinguished them from characteristics that are not indispensable (e.g., the th sounds [θ, ð] or the dark [ɪ]) even though they tend to rank high on EFL teachers' priority lists.

In describing the grammar, vocabulary use and pragmatics of ELF pioneering is the work carried out by the participants of the Vienna – Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE, n.d.) project. In the framework of this project Breiteneder's (2009) research revealed that in ELF communication it does not lead to misunderstanding if interactants fail to observe certain rules of grammar considered basic by teachers (e.g.: marking the verb for 3rd person singular in the present tense). Regarding the lexical features of ELF research found that the use of idioms and set ENL phrases would actually impede communication if applied unilaterally (Seidlhofer, 2004; but see also Sweeney & Hua, 2010). The analysis of successful NNS-NNS interactions in English led Meiercord to the conclusion that ELF talk was "overtly consensus oriented, cooperative, and mutually supportive" (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 218; see also Meiercord, 2000) therefore misunderstandings in ELF were rare. Dewey's (2007) data support the proposition that the frequent use of repetition, rephrasing and redundancy in ELF also serve the purpose of minimizing ambiguity and enhancing the clarity of the intended message. Building on previous research Canagarajah (2007, p. 925) observes that the description of EFL is made particularly difficult by the fact that it is constructed by its users "in each specific context of interaction" and that the form, i.e. "the appropriate grammar, lexical range, and pragmatic conventions" are negotiated by the interactants themselves in each particular case for the purpose of mutual intelligibility.

There is a group of experts (e.g., Ehrling, 2007; Hynninen, 2010; Timmis, 2002) who rather than describing lingua franca English took a different route and tried to map what attitudes students, teachers and language users in general have towards the notion of ELF. Timmis (2002) conducted a questionnaire survey among teachers and students from 45 countries which he combined with 15 follow up interviews with students. He tried to find out how participants related to applying NS norms in teaching and learning English in an era when the language is predominantly used in NNS-NNS interaction. Interesting-

ly enough, his data from close to 600 participants revealed that teachers were more ready to give up NS norms than students for most of whom the traditional idea of mastering English as spoken by natives with native-like pronunciation and grammar was a worthwhile endeavour.

Ehrling (2007) investigated the beliefs and attitudes of students of English at the Freie Universität Berlin via a questionnaire and interviews. Her students were genuine ELF users in the sense that regardless of their course of study, they had to frequently read professional literature, listen to lectures and write papers in English. They also used English outside the university on a regular basis. In this study, most of the students showed primary interest in English as spoken in the US or the UK, many of them were also interested in other varieties, and there were some who did not associate English with one particular country but saw in it a valuable means of establishing contact with people in countries where English is spoken as a *lingua franca*.

An interview study that focused specifically on the users' perception of ELF and how their views shaped their language use was Hynninen's (2010) investigation of 13 students in a Finnish context. Some of the interview data suggested that students saw ELF as a modified and simplified version of English whose aim was to achieve "mutual understanding among people who have varying command of English" (p. 35). Interestingly enough, these informants also expressed views related to "polishing" (p. 36) English, that is, they tried to make a conscious effort to achieve grammatical correctness when talking to native speakers of English. These interviewees also verbalized their opinion about the impossibility of reaching native level knowledge. As a conclusion, Hynninen pointed out a discrepancy in students' thinking between "notions of correctness and their experiences of what matters in ELF communication" (p. 40).

The research presented in the present paper is similar to the above: it was motivated by our interest in the students' views and opinions and by our intention of getting an insiders' perspective on ELF use. The data source in this case, however, is a large number of short student compositions on ELF vs. English as a native language (ENL), which will be described in the next section.

## Method

In the spring of 2010, first year students studying English as a major or minor subject at one of the big Hungarian universities wrote an Academic Writing Test: a short, so called one-paragraph essay on the topic of learning to speak English like a native. Although the essays were not written for research purposes, the ideas expressed in them lent themselves to analysis. This is why the authors decided to subject the essays to content analysis in order to see

whether Hungarian students in an English BA program are firmly convinced that learning to speak English like a native speaker is what they should strive for, whether they are aware of the presence of ELF in their lives and how they relate to this new phenomenon.

## **Participants and Context**

The 255 participants were all English BA students of the same university. The curriculum of both the major and the minor program includes English language classes, academic writing, English phonetics and phonology, syntax, morphology, the history and culture of English speaking countries, and several semesters of English and American literature. The language of instruction in all of these courses is English. This way the students are not only learners but also users of the language at the same time: they interact, read, write and take exams in English from day one of their studies. After graduation, students usually follow one of three routes: 1) they leave the university and look for a job where a good knowledge of English is required; 2) they continue their studies in an MA program; 3) they continue their studies in the TESOL track and become teachers of English. The faculty expects the students to want to improve their English constantly and autonomously both in and out of class, but there is no consensus as to what level of perfection should or can be aimed at. Although several students enter the program with a B2 or even a C1 knowledge of the language, the minimum required level of proficiency for English BA students to pass the first year general proficiency test is only B2+ on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference, Council of Europe, 2001) scale. It is important to note that since future teachers also go through this BA program before they enter the TESOL track, the way they relate to the norms in NNS use of English can later influence how they teach. As regards their motivation, previous research studies show that these students are both integratively and instrumentally motivated to learn English and they have positive attitudes towards English (Tóth, 2011). In addition, they "attach significant importance to the role of English in today's globalized world" (Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt, & Török, 2008, p. 79). An investigation conducted among university students and adult learners by Kormos and Csizér (2008) found that in each subgroup it is the participants' attitude to English as an international language that affects their image as a successful user of L2 in the future.

## The Instrument

The Academic Writing Test, taken close to the end of the first year of studies, consists of two parts: a guided summary and a one-paragraph essay. For the two tasks the students have 90 minutes altogether and the use of a dictionary is not allowed. The one-paragraph essay is an essay subgenre applied in the Academic writing program of the school. The Lead Tutor defines it as follows:

The one-paragraph essay is an essay subgenre used for pedagogical purposes (Henry & Rosebery, 1999). It consists of the same superstructural components as a multi-paragraph essay, that is, it has a title followed by an introduction, a developmental, and a concluding section. Rhetorically the main difference between a multi- and a one-paragraph essay is that in the latter the writer realizes the communicative functions of a separate introductory, concluding and several body paragraphs in one paragraph. The writing skills necessary to produce a one-paragraph essay are essentially identical on a micro level to those necessary to write a multi-paragraph essay. (Personal communication)

In 2010, the test rubrics included the following instructions:

Write a short (one-paragraph long) argumentative essay of 130-150 words on the topic of *whether it makes sense for students to learn to speak English like a native when the vast majority of English speakers are not natives*. Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

After the students took the writing test, received their grades and got feedback on their performance from their instructors, they were asked to give their consent to having their papers included in the analysis and were granted complete confidentiality. Participation in the research did not depend on the received grades: good and bad essays were equally included. When entering the data into a database, five essays had to be excluded from the analysis due to the students going off topic or completely misunderstanding the task. The final set thus contained 250 essays.

## Analysis

The texts were subjected to content analysis with the help of the qualitative software MAXQDA. Throughout the analysis the principles of qualitative research were observed (Frankel & Wallen, 1993; Holliday, 2002; Lazaraton, 2003; Patton, 2002). The fact that the students had to assume a point of view in the essay and argue for it made the coding of the data quite straightforward

(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). For enhanced dependability, the analysis was done independently by the two researchers in two stages. First, the first 40 texts were analyzed independently for emerging categories. Discussing the results, the two researchers established the categories and wrote brief definitions for each. Using the defined categories the remaining texts were analyzed, first again independently, then the results were compared and discussed unit by unit, and differences were sorted out jointly. The results are presented in Table 1.

The discussion of the results is supported by quotes from the student texts in order to create a thick description and enhance the trustworthiness of our findings (Guba, 1981; Holliday, 2002). All data excerpts are cited verbatim in their original, uncorrected form. In order to preserve the anonymity of the students, a code is assigned to each data segment which consists of the serial number of the essay (E) and the number of the text segment given by the data analysis software.

## **Results**

In the process of the analysis, 1341 text units were identified filling 23 categories and sub-categories. While in their thesis statements or in their closing sentences the majority of the students emphasized the need to learn to speak like a native (180 text units), many either explicitly argued for ELF use or at least acknowledged that English nowadays is primarily used among non-natives (169 text units). Taking into account the nature of the BA program with its heavy focus on descriptive linguistics and NS culture, the participants' preference for NS norms can be no surprise. In the case of students studying English as their major or minor subject, it is natural that proficiency in the language is not a mere tool for achieving goals – as for instance in the case of students learning English for specific purposes (ESP) (see Kontráné Hegybíró & Csizér, 2011), – it is the goal itself. Another important factor influencing students' attitudes to native norms is the proficiency exam at the end of the first year of studies which uses the ENL-based CEFR scale (Council of Europe, 2001) for assessing the students' achievement in English. These circumstances give special significance to those essays which put ELF into the focus, therefore in this paper we only present our results concerning ELF awareness and ELF use. The categories, definitions and the number of text units in each are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Frequencies of the text units concerning ELF awareness and ELF use.

Categories	Definition	Frequency
ELF awareness	Any indication that the student is generally aware of English being a lingua franca.	169
ELF characteristics	General awareness that ELF speakers use English in different ways or the mention of specific ELF features.	51
ELF pragmatics	The goal of mutual comprehensibility in ELF communication.	38
ELF other/ESP	Other aspects of ELF use including ELF for ESP.	21
Lack of NES contact	Students' awareness that they may not need English for interaction with native English speakers (NES).	8
NE impossibility	The impossibility of acquiring native English (NE) norms.	51
Total		338

Two of the categories in Table 1 'Lack of NES contact' and 'NE Impossibility' are negative ENL categories: by including statements on the low chance of students meeting NESs and on the impossibility of learning to speak like a native they indirectly support the idea of using English as a lingua franca in NNS-NNS communication.

## Discussion

In the following section, the ELF related results are discussed in detail according to the categories that emerged during the analysis of the essays.

### ELF Awareness

Students who show awareness of English being needed and/or used as a lingua franca often just state it as a fact in their essays: "currently English is the standard language of international communication among other nations" (E9, 43), that English is a "world language" (E17, 95), or that "English is the most known language in the world" (E 46, 312), although the number of those who actually use the term lingua franca itself – "English is the lingua franca of our age" (E 79, 482) – is low. It is interesting to see that in spite of their agreement that English is spoken by more non-native than native speakers, several students argue for learning to speak like a native: "Learning English like a native makes sense even though the majority of the speakers may not be natives" (E 15, 81).



On the other hand, there are also students whose standpoint is more firm and consistent, who from the high number of non-native users of English conclude that striving for native-like proficiency is not necessary: "I disagree with the statement that it makes sense for students to learn to speak English like a native when the majority of English speakers are not natives" (E 147, 839).

Some students mention that the emergence of ELF can be associated with globalization and add comments implying a negative value judgment regarding ELF:

"First of all, in our globalised world it is indispensable to speak not just your mother tongue, but other languages as well, especially English. English is the most widespread language nowadays; however, it does not mean everybody speaks it very well." (E24, 140)

The comments with which our participants describe the features of ELF and ELF use and what they think of it form a separate category.

### **ELF Characteristics**

Beyond the mere indication of ELF awareness there are statements in which students reveal what features of ELF they are familiar with. While several students dismiss ELF as poor, weak, incorrect, hard to understand, problematic, or even pidginized, "a wrong version of English, like Spanglish or Hunglish, which is useless to teach" (E151, 858), many take a neutral stand and simply state that the English used by NNSs is different. The opinion that the difference from the native variety does not make ELF bad or unacceptable is expressed quite well in Essay 116:

"Finally, as English is spoken from China to Argentina by millions of non-native speakers, a new, international English is born, which is, of course, different from how they speak in London or Sydney, but just as acceptable." (E116, 692)

This student's view ties in with the assertion of researchers who argue that ELF is a variety of English in its own right (House, 2003; Mauranen, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2004), or that ELF is one of the World Englishes (Jenkins, 2006a).

When describing the different features of English used by non-natives, our participants refer to grammar, syntax, lexis, and above all, pronunciation. Although these differences are frequently seen as obstacles that hinder smooth communication, echoing those trends in SLA research that tend to "construct nonnative speakers as defective communicators" (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 213), there are students who are aware of the increased focus on "accom-

modation skills” in ELF use (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 174): “In this case they have to accommodate to each other’s accent instead of being native-like” (E203, 1097). Student 12 emphasizes the need for paraphrasing skills to overcome lexical shortcomings: “you do not have to know as many words in English as a native speaker, because even if you do not know how a certain expression is in English, you can explain what you want to say” (E12, 64). According to ELF researchers, communication breakdown can result from “unilateral idiomaticity” (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 220) an aspect also pointed out by the following student: “It often happens that you are familiar with advanced words and expressions, but you cannot use them, since your partner is not on the same level as you are” (E 115, 682).

ELF characteristics are not features the students would have learnt about as part of their coursework, since in the first year of their studies English major students in this BA program do not get any applied linguistics and do not hear or read about the theories of teaching and learning languages. It is therefore interesting to see that some students are aware of how languages are living organisms that change all the time and how impossible it is to identify one proper way of using them:

“On [the] one hand, a language is always on the change and it is especially true in the case of a world language. The diversity of languages with their own rules makes us think that there is no point in insisting on the proper way as there is no proper way.” (E46, 312)

In ELF vs. ENL discourse the issue of identity is a frequent topic of debate. When learners strive to approximate NS norms, not only their language but also their behavior and cultural patterns might be affected. In ELF use, however, there is no need to assume a NES identity, and the speakers’ accent, language use and behavior can express their L1 self. As Pözl (2003, p. 7) put it, in ELF settings, “co-participants can ‘export’, appropriate or re-invent their cultural identities”. A strong awareness of this feature of ELF use is expressed by one of the participants in our study as well: “Finally, the way how you speak and express yourself in English can represent your cultural identity which became important in our global world” (E 245, 1296). As we can see, in this student’s view globalization and the global use of English does not mean representing a uniform, global culture. Quite to the contrary, it means the importance of people expressing their L1 self when using English.

## **ELF Pragmatics**

In this category we included statements in which our participants expressed their views about achieving the purpose of communication in ELF-terms. ELF researchers (e.g., Meierkord, 2000) observe that since in the lingua franca use of English the goal is mutual comprehensibility, the success of communication does not depend on linguistic accuracy but on the achievement of the communicative goal. Misunderstandings are rare because interactants are consensus seekers and tend to suspend their own norms and expectations. They avoid unilateral idiomaticity and apply paraphrasing skills. ELF users need good accommodation skills which enable them to adjust their language to that of the interlocutor in pronunciation, lexis or syntax (Seidlhofer, 2004).

The participants of the present research made several statements in which they knowingly or instinctively support the above observations of ELF researchers. As regards achieving the goals of communication, students reject the necessity of "perfect" language use, that is, ENL norms: "one uses the language to express his opinions and perfection is not needed for that purpose" (E25, 149). The same is expressed by Student 116: "the most important thing is not being perfect but being understood (E116, 692). This applies not only to simple situations of buying bread (E99) or booking a room (E152), but also to language use in other domains: English speakers "do not consider native speaking important if they can achieve their aims without native skills in the field of work or studies" (E147, 841).

The participants emphasize that native-like knowledge of English is not necessary for successful communication either in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary: "even with horrible grammar or pronunciation we can be successful as long as we can get our partner to understand what we want to say" (E221, 1181). Some students even observe that mutual comprehensibility is easier between NNSs than in NS-NNS interaction: "Finally, it is easier to understand a non-native speaker, because you might face the same ambiguity he/she does" (E50, 332). Similar observations have been made by researchers investigating ELF in business contexts (BELF), where NNSs are found to have better accommodation skills and are more prepared to negotiate meaning (Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

## **Other/ESP**

In the Other/ESP category we grouped statements that emphasized further aspects of ELF use, or listed further arguments against the use of ENL norms. Several students pointed out that in real life, native-like competence

would not be expected either in everyday interaction or in the domain of work unless someone's goal was to become a translator or interpreter. They also observed that for many students of English learning the language meant learning an ESP variety, English for business, technology, the various sciences or the Internet, where native-like skills would not be expected or necessary; far more important are good communication skills: "What is more, employers on the job interviews don't consider native speaking as an important factor; most people just care about whether your English skills are good or bad" (E100, 595). This statement is supported by informal information from our graduates who relate that at job interviews they frequently are not asked to present a language exam certificate, instead their language skills are assessed on the spot: the interviews are conducted in English and applicants have to perform individual or group tasks in English. Hungarian students of English are not alone with this opinion. Their views are an exact match of what Ehrenreich (2010) found in her research on BELF in a German multinational company. Ehrenreich asserts that in her research context "[n]ative speaker proficiency in English (ENL) is neither expected nor necessarily beneficial. The concept is dismissed as "unrealistic" and also described as "unnecessary" from a cost-benefit point of view" (p. 418).

### **Rejection of the Native-like Ideal**

In the process of analysis two categories emerged which, by rejecting the idea of speaking like a native, support the arguments for ELF use in an indirect way. In the small category of *Lack of NES contact* we have statements in which the students argue that there is little need for speaking like a native if one is not likely to meet native speakers and will only use English in NNS-NNS interaction: "students do not actually need to know how to speak like a native because they are not likely to have the chance of using that knowledge" (E91, 550).

The other category is labeled *NE impossibility*, which includes statements in which the students explain the impossibility for a NNS to learn to speak English like a native for objective reasons, suggesting that on the part of the learner it is not a matter of choice to speak like a NNS, it is a given fact. In an indirect way these are also arguments for learning to use English as a lingua franca detached from NS norms: "As we are native speakers of Hungarian we will never be able to speak English as well as our mother tongue. This is true for other nations as well" (E114, 676). In essay 107 the student explains that learning to speak like a native is impossible "because a foreigner will never be able to think and act like an English man although it is part of becoming a native speaker" (E107, 630). Almost the same idea is expressed by the writer of

essay 125, who also thinks that native-like use presupposes thinking in English and using it as the language that is closest to one's identity:

"First, it is impossible for students of a different mother language to reach a native speaker's level, since they do not use English as a mother tongue: they do not think in English, do not communicate with their families in English." (E125, 740)

According to the writer of essay 119, speaking like a native actually requires the "life experience" of a native, and that cannot be achieved by hard work and a strong will (E119, 709).

The research participants approach this issue from various angles when naming their own reasons why it is impossible for a NNS to acquire English at a native or near-native level. Some look for reasons in the difference between L1 and L2 acquisition pointing out that "the way of learning our mother tongue cannot be replicated" (E170, 943). One possibility for learning to speak like a native in a NN country would be to be raised bilingually in a mixed ethnicity family, which of course is an objective circumstance that learners themselves cannot control: "First of all one can never become a perfect speaker unless he acquires the English language in native circumstances or is brought up to be bilingual one of his parents being a native English speaker" (E25, 148). The most frequent argument supporting the impossibility of learning to speak like a native is that native competence can only be achieved if the learner can spend an extended period of time in the native environment, which is not a feasible option for most learners: "native knowledge can only be reached in decades of hard work and spending years in an English-speaking country – which only the lucky few can afford" (E67, 420). For others, acquiring native-like competence is a matter of age: "What is more, you have to start learning at a very early age, preferably before the age of seven, to acquire English language properly" (E115, 683). One student points out, however, that although an extended stay abroad can help one lose one's foreign accent and become an efficient communicator, it will still not necessarily lead to the person actually thinking in English, because the speaker's "cultural background cannot be denied that is why it is very difficult not to think in their first language" (E102, 603).

For some students the impossibility is caused by the English language itself: it is too difficult and is spoken in too many varieties and by too many foreign speakers. One of the students argues that English is difficult even for its NSs:

"In addition, English is so complex that even native speakers have problems with it; therefore teaching it as a native language would be very difficult, especially when the different dialects of it are taken into consideration." (E 134, 782)

Finally, some of our participants reject the idea of trying to speak like a native not only because it is impossible but because it is undesirable: “it will not benefit one in any way,” (E221, 1183), or “it is nonsense” (E245, 1295). The writer of essay 188 is the most critical of all: “Fake accents and certain attitudes picked up from television shows or films can make any speaker look desperate and in most cases – ridiculous” (E188, 1026). Student 123 feels that the expectation that students should learn to speak like a native, which as we can see is an unattainable goal for most learners, is actually demotivating: “Thirdly, if there is required to speak as a native speaker, more and more people would not begin learning the language” (E123, 731). This view is particularly important for teachers to be aware of. Without motivation, it is difficult to be successful in language learning and if insisting on unattainable NS norms has a demotivating effect, language teachers need to readjust their expectations.

The above arguments against learning to speak like a native are therefore strong arguments for the teaching and learning of ELF, which sets attainable goals and does not require the speaker to assume a different identity, or to speak, act and think like someone they are not.

### Conclusion and Implications

The aim of our research was not to prove a hypothesis or to add to the available descriptions of various ELF features but to get an insider’s perspective of what is going on in the minds of those learners and users of English who are studying to become English language professionals. Our results provide evidence of a definite awareness of the lingua franca use of English among the investigated population of Hungarians since a large portion of students make statements acknowledging not only the worldwide importance of knowing English but also that today English is used by far more NNSs than NSs of the language. In their descriptive comments we can recognize a variety of ELF features identified by researchers regarding pronunciation vocabulary, grammar and pragmatic use. This, however, does not mean that all our research participants also favor the use of ELF; in fact, the majority express a strong preference for native varieties *in spite of* the fact that most interactions today take place between NNSs. In this sense our findings corroborate those presented by Timmis (2002) or Hynninen (2010), who each found that students identified correct and respectable use of English with NS use, and wanted to follow that model irrespective of the changing role of English in the world. Many of the Hungarian students feel that ELF use is incorrect and reject it as such. On the other hand, there is a tangible awareness among the students of the changes taking place in the NNS use of English. There is also awareness of the numerous varieties of English which

makes it impossible for someone to try to follow *the* native speaker model. Another important point is the participants' awareness of language being used for achieving communicative purposes and of the fact that this goal requires accommodation skills and the use of communication strategies more than idiomatic language use and high levels of accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. There is also awareness of ELF being culture neutral and that assuming a native speaker identity is not part and parcel of speaking it well or efficiently.

From the point of view of teaching there are a few implications worth mentioning. The first one is the importance of teaching communication strategies and accommodation skills to students so that they can function effectively in NNS-NNS interactions. A second implication is that the potentially demotivating effect of enforcing NS norms needs to be mitigated. In Hungary, where there is a strong need for increasing the number of foreign language speakers (42%) to at least the EU average (56%) level (European Commission, 2006), it is important to set achievable goals for the learners and to increase their confidence in using foreign languages, among them English. In ELF use, the goal for the learner to achieve is not NES competence but the competence of an expert L2 user. As one of our participants formulated it: "Students therefore shall concentrate on learning it the best they can, while accepting the fact that one must be born a native in order to sound, behave and speak English like a native" (E188, 1027).

Finally, we must acknowledge that our study also has some limitations. Since the essays were produced in an exam situation and according to set conventions there is a chance that some students wrote something in order to complete the task only. As a result, it is possible that not all of their statements reflect their true opinion; however, we believe that this can also happen when students write something for research purposes. Since at the time of data collection the participants were at the beginning of their English BA studies before learning about sociolinguistics, second language acquisition theories or varieties of English, it is our intention to repeat the data collection with the same group of students in their third year and complement it with individual or group interviews. This second round of investigations should help us see how far the students' opinions remained the same or if the training they received in their upper years shaped their views on speaking English like a native.

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